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Parshas Vayigash ✍️ Rabbi Moshe Katz

Simchas Hachayim & Krias Shema

“*Yosef* ... went to meet his father... he appeared to him, fell on his neck and he wept on his neck excessively.” (46:29)

The Torah relates the emotional reunion between *Yaakov* and *Yosef*. The implication is that while *Yosef* embraced *Yaakov* and cried, *Yaakov* did not reciprocate. *Rashi* comments in the name of *Chazal* that *Yaakov* was reciting *Krias Shema*.

Commentaries have long been puzzled by the fact that rather than embrace *Yosef*, *Yaakov* chose to recite the *Shema* at this time. Wasn't this the time to hug his beloved son?

Rav Shlomo Breur ZTL, suggests that the key lies in the climax of the *Shema*, “*uvchol nafsh'cha*, with all your soul, our obligation to love *Hashem* with our very lives. To, if called upon, sacrifice our lives to demonstrate our love of *Hashem*. Surely *Yaakov* recited these words daily. And of course he meant it with every fiber of his body. But there was something lacking.

Two people may say with equal fervor that they would be willing to give up their lives for *Hashem*, but, depending on their state of mind, the declaration of one may be much more meaningful than the other's.

What decides how meaningful a person's declaration of “*uvchol nafsh'cha*” is?

It depends on how excited he is about life. How precious life is to him. And how much he has to live for and look forward to.

When *Yaakov* was lead to believe that *Yosef* was killed, the Torah says, “*All his sons and daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused*”... “*For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.*” (37:35-36)

Yaakov was in constant grief and, as a result, the *Shechina*,

Hashem's presence, which only rests on a person who is joyful, left him. (*Rashi*, 45:27)

For twenty two years *Yaakov* had lost his *simchas hachayim*, his joy for life. And as a result, his *Shma* was not complete. His willingness to sacrifice his life for *Hashem* did not reflect the depth of his love for *Hashem*.

But as soon as he heard that *Yosef* was alive?

His heart burst with joy. He had so much to look forward to. Life became precious again! “*There is much joy and gladness for me!*” (45:28)

And when he finally saw *Yosef*, his *simcha* was beyond description!

What was the first thing he wanted to do?

To really say the *Shema* for the first time in 22 year!

To declare, at the height of his joy, that there is no limit to his love of *Hashem*. That if called upon he would, even then, be willing to give up his precious life for *Hashem*!

... This is a profound message for us.

What is a prerequisite to a truly meaningful *Krias Shema*?

Simchas Hachayim!

Rabbi Katz, an alumnus of the kollel, is co-director of Chicago Torah Network, and learns daily at the kollel.

OPENING CURTAINS ON SHABBOS

Rabbi Akiva Niehaus

Q: I would like to open the curtains in my living room on *Shabbos* in order to brighten the room. Am I permitted to do so even if there are houseplants in the room which will benefit from the sunlight?

A: One of the 39 forbidden *melachos* of *Shabbos* is *zoraya*, planting. Included in this *melacha* is any act which causes something to grow, such as dropping a seed in soil or watering a plant. The *Shvisas HaShabbos* (*zoraya* 10) writes that this *melacha* includes exposing a plant to sunlight, as indicated in the *Yerushalmi* (*Shabbos* 7:2).

Let us clarify if exposing a plant to sunlight is prohibited *midioraisa* (Biblically) or *midirabbanan* (Rabbinically). The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 81b) says that if one moves a potted plant from on top of pegs and sets it down on the ground he is liable for “planting.” The *Hagahas Ashri* (*Shabbos* 8:2), explains that the term “liable” refers to a Rabbinic prohibition, for by placing a plant in a location where its ability to draw nourishment from the ground is merely increased, one is Rabbinically liable for the *melacha* of “planting.” However, the Biblical act of “planting” has not been violated since the plant would have continued to grow without this interference.

We learn an important rule from this *gemara*. If one performs an act of “planting,” without which the plant would not have grown (*e.g.*, one drops a seed into soil), one has violated the Biblical prohibition of “planting.” If, however, one’s act merely *increased* the plant’s ability to grow, one has only violated a Rabbinical prohibition. (See *Iglei Tal*, *Zoraya* 9, *MG”A* 312:3.) Accordingly, if one’s houseplants are able to grow without sunlight, by exposing them to sunlight one has only violated a Rabbinical prohibition. (*Shu”t Har Tzvi* O.C. 133, *Yechave Daas* 5:29) Additionally, some *Poskim* write that any “planting” done in a pot which is not directly over soil (*e.g.*, in a house on top of a hard floor) is only Rabbinical in nature, similar to planting in a non-perforated pot. (*Iglei Tal* *ibid.*, *Shvisas Hashabbos*, *Kotzair*, s.k. 9. See, however, *Minchas Chinuch* *ibid.* and *Nishmas Adam* 11:1)

The *Poskim* suggest various reasons that the Rabbinical prohibition would **not** apply to opening curtains in front of houseplants:

1) Because the violation of opening the curtains is Rabbinical, there is room to be lenient based upon the ruling of the *Terumas Hadeshen* (*siman* 66) who writes that one may do a permissible act even if an unintended forbidden consequence (a *psik reisha*) is inevitable. Although the *halacha* follows the *Magen Avraham* (314:5) who forbids such an act (*M.B.* 314:11), many *Poskim* hold that a *psik reisha* is permitted when two Rabbinical prohibitions apply (*i.e.*, planting over a hard floor is a Rabbinic prohibition, and increasing a plant’s growth is also only Rabbinical). (*Shaar Hatziyun* 316:15)

2) The *Rashba* (*Shabbos* 106b) writes that if a deer runs into one’s house on *Shabbos*, one may not close the front door with the sole intention of

trapping the deer, but may do so if his intention is also to protect his house. The *Ran* (*ibid.*) has difficulty understanding the *Rashba*, for even if one intends solely to protect his house, closing the door is forbidden because this act inevitably traps the deer (a *psik reisha*). In order to explain the position of the *Rashba*, many explanations are offered. One explanation, favored by many *Poskim*, is that closing the door of a house when a deer is inside is not intrinsically an act of “trapping” because one has not touched the deer with his hands. Only if one’s intention is solely to trap the animal does this action become an act of “trapping.” Therefore, the *Rashba* writes that closing the door with the intent to protect his house, without a “hands-on” act of trapping, is permitted on *Shabbos*. (Dragging a heavy bench on dirt, a classic example of *psik reisha* because the creation of a furrow is inevitable, is forbidden because its hands-on nature constitutes an act of “plowing.”) (*Avnei Nezer* O.C. 194, *Chelkas Yoav* O.C. 11)

Based on this reasoning, any action which is not intrinsically a forbidden act is permissible on *Shabbos* even if a forbidden result is a natural consequence. Accordingly, opening a window curtain in front of a houseplant is not defined as an act of “planting” because one has not directly touched the plant (or the catalyst for its growth). Therefore, if one’s intention is to brighten the room, one may open the curtain even if the sunlight will help the plants grow.

Although the *halacha* follows the *Ran* that one may not close the front door of a house if a deer will be locked inside (*M.B.* 316:25), there is room for leniency in combination with other leniencies.

3) The *Poskim* offer an additional reason to permit opening the curtains. The sun was already shining before the curtains were opened; by opening them one merely removed the impediment to the sunlight. As such, this act would be classified as a *grama* (indirect cause). Although such an act is usually Rabbinically forbidden, it is permitted in our case if one does not intend to help the plants grow. It must be noted, however, that this leniency applies only if the plants are slightly distant from the curtains. If, however, the plants are located directly behind the curtains, opening the curtains would be considered a *direct* action, as opposed to an indirect one, and would therefore be forbidden. (*Har Tzvi* *ibid.*)

In summary, opening a curtain in front of a houseplant, which merely increases the ability of the plant to grow, is a Rabbinical prohibition. Additionally, any planting done in a pot over a hard floor only violates a Rabbinic prohibition according to some *Poskim*. Some *Poskim* maintain that a Rabbinical prohibition is not violated if one’s intention is a permissible result (even if the forbidden result is inevitable). Therefore, one has not violated the prohibition if one’s intention is solely to brighten the room. Additionally, some *Poskim* write that since opening a curtain is not a “hands-on” form of “planting,” no prohibition has been violated. Furthermore, opening the curtain merely removes the impediment; as such, this action is classified as indirect (*grama*).

In conclusion, the *halacha* is that one may open a curtain on *Shabbos* in front of a houseplant if one’s sole intention is to brighten the room (*Kitzur Hilchos Shabbos* 6:1, Harav D. Zucker *shlita*). However, some *Poskim* advise that the curtains not be opened if the plants are directly in front of the curtains because in that instance, the act is not a *grama*. (*Yechave Daas* *ibid.*, see *Har Tzvi* *ibid.*, *Kovetz Ohr Yisrael* VII pg. 16-17, 20-22)

Rabbi Niehaus is a full-time member of the kollel.